

# Better Homes and Centers



Michigan Department of  
Social Services

Social Development

Issue 16 Spring 1988

## HELP THE CHILD TO BECOME HUMAN

*Dorothy H. Cohen*

Our world of synthetics and computers allows for vast production and distribution of material goods. But this technology in no way substitutes for the particular and special requirements of our children, whose need is not for efficiency and production rates but to grow into humanness. For them, interaction with people and the natural world is still the road to social, emotional, moral, and intellectual maturing. That road is being bypassed more and more as the criteria for efficient production are applied unthinkingly to the education of children.

Thus, as we come to value the speed with which we can circumnavigate the globe, we must stop to remember that growth in children is still slow.

As we grow more and more accustomed to large spaces and vast distances, let us not forget that children think of the minute, the immediate, the concrete.

As we learn to accept the replication and duplication of models in place of individual creative effort, we must not overlook the diverse nature of human beings that results in the uniqueness of every child, a uniqueness that is nowhere duplicated and which we should not attempt to remold into a replicable model.

As we come to rely on the mechanics of doors that open silently before us, of buttons and levers that keep us from exerting "unnecessary" physical effort, let us not fail to remember that the basis for competence in childhood is the competence of the body in action, its ability to function, and its mastery of the environment through physical means.

As we avail ourselves of the retrieval systems that often help us avoid doing our own thinking, let us bear in mind that the computer is a product of the human brain, no more than a giant adding machine, and that unless the mind of a child is allowed to develop fully through trial and error, exploration and experimentation, it will not develop beyond the level of the adding machine itself.

We must not evade the reality that to be human is to feel as well as to think, and feeling cannot be systematized, packaged, or taught. It must be experienced within the context of meaningful interaction

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## DIRECTOR'S CORNER

We are making a concerted effort to improve the quality of the way we regulate child care organizations.

All of us in the Division are pressed with responsibilities and expectations which sometimes exceed our capacity to carry them out. Yet, we are all committed to reducing the risk to young children in day care settings. How we do that becomes very important. The entire Bureau of Regulatory Services has spent the last several months developing guidelines to accomplish this.

I'd like to share with you a few that will most directly affect you.

1. We intend to carry out licensing responsibilities with objectivity, consistency, openness and fairness. We are striving to do it right the first time. Our goal is that licensees conform with established requirements. We intend to provide support for licensees to meet requirements and the needs of those in care.

2. We believe that the licensing function must include a partnership between the broader community and ourselves to help assure that monitoring does not become exclusively the role of the bureau.

3. We hope to develop an atmosphere where both the licensee and the bureau work toward the mutual purpose of providing humane and safe environments for children in care.

Being imperfect in an imperfect world we know we will occasionally stumble; however, we accept the notion that while we are doing many things well, we can always do them better. We are headed for difficult economic times both as a Department and a State. This fact alone makes it more important that we continue to strive for excellence in the way we manage and regulate child care in Michigan.

Ted deWolf, Director  
Division of Child Day Care Licensing

# HELP THE CHILD . . .

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with people and the environment. Above all we must expect that feeling will be for others as well as for oneself. We must stress the social responsibility of each for all and of all for each.

Let us safeguard the humanness of our children by

guaranteeing the interaction they require to turn them into human beings.

*Dorothy Cohen Was Senior Faculty Member, Graduate Programs, Bank Street College of Education, New York until her death on July 6, 1979.*

*Reprinted from Young Children, November, 1979.*

## STRATEGIES FOR RAISING HEALTHY CHILDREN IN A STRESS-FILLED WORLD

*Stanley Roth  
Licensing Supervisor  
Grand Rapids*

Many of the practices and habits of our fast-track society threaten the welfare of our children. Increasingly, children report that they experience the everyday pressures of daily life as stressful. Their abilities to cope with stress are very limited. Fatigue, depression, adolescent alcoholism and drug abuse, teen pregnancy, boredom and vandalism are all symptoms of the consequences of being rushed unready into adulthood.

Children are not miniature adults. They do not think or feel the same way as adults do. As adults interested in the welfare of our children, we need to ask ourselves some questions. What can we do to help children who are being unnecessarily pressured to grow up too fast, and experience this as excessively stressful. What can we do to help children to cope successfully in a pressure-cooker world?

As a parent, I frequently ask myself these questions. My answers are limited but I have found some strategies that work.

1. Delay children's entry into formal school. Think carefully. Sooner is not necessarily better for the child.

2. Control the use of TV in your home. It is probably the single most powerful force in the lives of

children today. Adults should screen what children see.

3. Let little girls be little girls. Postpone ear piercing and heavy makeup to an appropriate age.

4. Let little boys be little boys. Postpone participation in adult-directed Little League or other competitive sports.

5. Give kids a chance to err without feeling like failures.

6. Talk less. Listen . . . and then listen some more.

7. Parents, slow yourselves down. Learn more about child development. Say some prayers, meditate. Read and use *Think of Something Quiet* by Clare Cherry.

8. Learn to just say "no" to your children. Set clear limits, establish rules with consequences. Stick to them.

9. Limit the number of organized, scheduled activities children participate in.

10. Avoid serving and buying kiddie cocktails, sending 5-year-olds to all-night Halloween or New Year's Eve parties, permitting 1st, 2nd, and 3rd graders to stay up on school nights to watch violent, scary movies.

Wait. What seems "cute" today may not be so funny later on.

# SUPPORTING FRIENDSHIPS IN THE FIRST AND SECOND YEARS

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What can you expect in social behavior from the infants in your care? Of course, you are aware of how babies relate to you. They vocalize, coo, laugh and eventually talk. They watch your face and hands as you give them basic care and play with them. Until recently we did not realize that infants also could develop simple social relationships with other infants. This shows up more in group settings like child care.

In children under the age of two, social skills are closely related to the child's developing motor and vocal skills. Infants begin first by watching each other. Gazing at another child for an extended period of time has been reported in infants as young as two-months old. This is not surprising since infants prefer to look at faces or pictures of faces over other designs.

The second step is touching. When a child three or four-months-old is placed close to another, they will touch and pat each other. Children explore each other

does not want to give it up, is common, but children with more experience with peers appear to engage in more positive interactions than inexperienced ones. Appropriate social behaviors are learned just like self-feeding or getting dressed and require much practice and a supportive, vigilant adult.

Here are some things you can try:

1. **Help babies become more familiar with one another.** Children engage in more social behavior with a familiar friend. Familiar surroundings encourage social interactions, and, having you nearby allows the child to feel comfortable enough to initiate social contact. Strange babies in unfamiliar settings are most likely to frighten each other, especially if their caregivers are not physically near.
2. **Vary the number of toys available during a period of time.** Having some interesting toys available can give a focus to infants' play as they show them to each other or offer and accept them. However, when there are few toys, children spend more time looking, smiling, gesturing, and vocalizing to each other.
3. **Control the number of infants in a small space.** Just as too many toys can be distracting, so can too many children. Infants and toddlers function best with one child at a time. Separate spaces with bolsters or dividers, especially for the youngest children, to simplify their social contact and maintain good supervision. When they are in larger groups, they again focus on toys instead of each other. There are likely to be more bumps and pushes in a group of young children each focused on their own activities than in a pair that is paying attention to one another.

Since we know that skills learned by children are not unlearned later, we can assume that there will be some effect from your efforts. Babies gradually become more skillful preschoolers. It is both interesting and exciting to provide children with this opportunity and to observe their social development with friends during the first two years.

\*This paper is based primarily on information found in: Osofsky, J.O., editor. *Infant-infant interaction. Handbook of Infant Development*. 1979, Wiley-Interscience, New York.



in the same manner that they explore objects. Supervising infants means you must watch out for fingers in the eyes or ears or overzealous mouthings of each other's toes.

At six months, babies smile in response to the sight of another baby or to another child's coos or other vocalizations. After they become mobile, crawling and then walking, they will begin to approach or follow a peer. Children will show toys to one another and pass them back and forth. By one year familiar peers have been observed playing games like peek-a-boo or run-and-chase. All these encounters are not positive. Touching can be hitting and taking a toy from someone who



# ACCEPTING CHILDREN WHERE THEY ARE

Nancy Moorman, Kindergarten Teacher  
and Special Consultant Gifted Education  
Bay City

Adults who accept children see themselves as learners as well as teachers. They do not assume that they always know where a child should play, with whom a child should play, or in which activities the child should engage. They do not believe that they know best when a child is hungry, thirsty, sleepy, or in need of exercise. They carefully observe and listen in order to *learn* how to meet the emotional, physical, and intellectual needs of each child. They read about the development characteristics shared by the age level of the children in their care so they can encourage and guide more effectively, but they understand that each child will demonstrate his own unique interests and abilities. These adults understand that they must meet the child where she is now to teach effectively, regardless of where they think the child ought to be.

One way to demonstrate acceptance of individual levels of development is to allow time for children to complete their tasks. There is a great deal of talk in schools these days about "time on task", and the myth of the short attention span is widely accepted. Teachers and parents complain that children never finish what they start. The truth is that children have an incredible ability to stay with a task if the task is one that interests them, and we undermine the development of attention span and deter children from completing a project when we constantly admonish them to hurry up and warn them that they are "almost out of time." We frustrate children and disrupt their learning when we force them to stop before they are ready. It is important that children leave a task satisfied that they have answered their own questions and exhausted the possibilities as they see them.

One little girl attended her first day of nursery school with much anticipation and a sizeable case of nerves. At the end of the session, her mother buckled her safely into the back seat of the car and asked, "Well, how was it?" The little girl gave this some thought and then answered, "It was just great, except for this one lady who kept interrupting me."

Some children hurry through activities and finish sooner than you wish. Perhaps they have not put effort into the project, have done it sloppily, or are distracted by something more interesting to them. These are all clues that the activity does not match the ability or interest of the child. Ask yourself, "How can I change the activity to meet the needs of more children? How

can I create this so there are no right or wrong answers? Can I give them any more choices? How can the activity be personalized for each child? Can these same skills be developed without the use of paper and pencil?" Perhaps you can replace worksheets and coloring books with sheets of plain paper so the child can draw from his or her own experiences and knowledge. Tell yourself that it doesn't matter *what* children write, but *that* they write. Then be there to support their learning by answering questions and giving help when it is asked for.

If children are still bored or distracted, accept it and let them go. Too often we attempt to motivate children to like an activity, when we should instead change activities to meet the needs of the children. Attempting to control another person's interests creates frustration and wastes time. The best we can do is offer open-ended activities based on what we know about the interests and learning-styles of young children. We invite, not require, and remain flexible enough to change our plans should the children's interests dictate.

Finally, one important way that teachers and caregivers can accept children at their own levels is to steadfastly refuse to "get them ready" for nursery school, kindergarten, or first grade. When teachers feel they must get a child ready for what lies ahead, they may create a pressurized atmosphere where children lose control of their own learning. Children may experience boredom, shame, guilt, or frustration because they are uninterested in the subject matter or unable to give teachers what they want and expect. The focus must always be on helping each child experience fully the capabilities already present. Through the resulting joy and security the child will move forward to new knowledge and skills. If we do not destroy motivation and love for learning through pressure and demands, then we will not have to figure out later how to make children want to learn.

A balance is necessary between protecting and retarding, preparing and pressuring, freedom and structure, so that young children are able to learn and grow comfortably and efficiently according to individual timetables. This is accomplished most effectively when teachers and caregivers demonstrate through attitudes and actions, their acceptance of the child as she is right now.

# DONUTS AND DISCIPLINE

Carole M. Grates  
Licensing Consultant  
Saginaw County

It's 11:00 a.m. and free play is over. The children are sitting on the rug ready for group time — except for Nathan who is darting from space to space and then erupts into a temper tantrum when asked to sit with the group.

Is Nathan "bad"? It would be easy if that were the solution. We could then discard the Nathans of the world or at least place all of them in one room and concentrate on the other children.

But as early childhood professionals we have a belief in children that usually sends us off in the direction of detective work. Why is Nathan doing this? Dr. Lendon Smith, in his book, *Feed Your Kids Right*, says, "Humans are basically cheerful and gracious. When they are not, usually it is because something is preventing this attitude from surfacing." What could this something be?

We find it easy to consider Nathan's immaturity (is he really ready for the activity) or his environment (what happened at home last night?) But how often do we consider nutrition, allergies or perceptual problems as triggers for inappropriate behavior?

Nutrition is basic to our well-being. You might ask, "What did Nathan have for breakfast?" Many children in our society consume a breakfast high in sugar and

white flour — donuts, pop-tarts, sugared cereals. In some, this sends the blood sugar level up to near diabetic levels. When the body forces kick in the insulin to lower the blood sugar level to a safer level, a downward spiral begins and often sends the blood sugar level lower than when the child woke up. The child reacts with hyperactivity, attention problems, or listlessness.

Allergies are another possible cause. Many allergies cause fluid to collect in the middle ear. This may not be enough to prompt a visit to the doctor as an ear infection would, but it could be enough to affect hearing or balance. The young child does not know what is wrong with him and in any case, probably does not have the words to tell us. His behavior mirrors his frustration.

Food allergies can cause fluctuations in blood sugar levels. Chemicals in food or fumes from cleaning products can have the same effect on some children. This can result in listlessness, a "spaced out" mental state, or irritability.

Another factor to consider is an auditory or visual perceptual problem. A young child who has had numerous ear infections may have minimally impaired hearing. If he cannot hear what you are asking, he cannot do it. Another child may be extremely sensitive to the noise level of the child care setting. A third child may react to fluorescent lights.

What can you do? Before Nathan enters your program, get a good physical history from his parents. This should include his usual diet, any allergies, and past medical problems. If Nathan shows a dramatic change in behavior, from acceptable to inappropriate, start your detective work. Has something happened at home? Did he have a change in diet? Has he been exposed to a new food or a new chemical?

Look at your own program. Is it appropriate for Nathan's age level? What did you serve for breakfast? Did you have a special celebration with extra sweets?

It takes much effort to be a detective but the benefits for you, the child, and the other children in care are worth it.

## Resources

*When Children Invite Child Abuse*, by Svea J. Gold, Fern Ridge Press, 1986.

*Feed Your Kids Right*, by Lendon Smith, M.D., McGraw-Hill, 1979.



# SAYING GOODBYE: "IS DENVER FARTHER THAN HAWAII?"

*Laura Savela, Family Day  
Care Home Provider  
Ingham County*

Perhaps leaving a family day care setting, for whatever reasons, (moving, going to school, or a provider/parent disagreement) will never be considered a particularly traumatic occurrence. But, ask any caregiver who has taken children into her life and home day after day, and she will tell you saying goodbye to a child is one of the unspoken hazards and little-addressed issues of the occupation. I am still feeling the affects of separation from my first two day care children.

Mark and Sean are brothers, ages 4 and 5, who were a part of my household every week day for almost two years. We ate breakfast, lunch, and an occasional dinner together so many times, they seemed a part of my family. One morning I was jolted by hearing their excited announcement, "We're moving to Denver!!!" I assumed that their pending departure was a by-product of their parent's recent divorce. After verifying with their mothers that in too few days, they would be leaving, I began planning how I could soften the blow that yet another person who loved them would be yanked out of their lives.

We began by opening a map of the U.S. to look up Denver. I answered the questions of how many days it would take to drive there and could they get back here for Halloween? Was Denver farther than Hawaii? Their destination might as well have been China or the moon — so long as they could come back to trick-or-treat. So much for the Atlas.

We talked about Sean going to kindergarten and Mark going to someone else's house to be cared for — a shadowy and vague future for a 4 and 5 year old to imagine — and for myself as well. These children had shared the arrival of my first baby. They sat countless times at my dinner table, napped sweetly in my bed, laughed, cried, played and fought in all the rooms of my home, and my heart. I lost sleep over their hurt feelings and problems, and now began to suspect that preparing them for this separation was as much for my benefit as it was for theirs. During our conversations those last few days, it was difficult for any of us to imagine life with anyone but each other. The idea of going away continued to seem exciting to them. But, each time I gently reminded them that they wouldn't be coming to see me everyday, and that I wouldn't be seeing them for a long while, they would blink, bite off another chunk of their peanut butter and jelly sandwich and ask for more milk.

Instead of concentrating on the future, I decided to impress upon them a healthy and positive picture of

their recent past. It may seem odd to reminisce with a 4 and 5 year old, but almost necessary in this case to remind them of the good things in their lives and for something strong and solid to carry with them. We talked about all the things we had done together, all of us remembering unique details of our adventure and holidays and jokes together.

We threw a special going-away party after day care hours just for the two of them on their last day in town. I served them all their favorite foods, read them all their favorite books, sang their favorite songs, laughing and giggling the night away. We exchanged gifts and phone numbers and addresses. I gave them a small framed photograph of me, my husband, and baby boy — a last attempt to somehow be a part of their lives in the future.

As we walked out to the front yard to say our goodbyes, I wondered if I had done my job in preparing them for this moment. My objectives has been simple and common sense: to explain to them where and why they were going; to show them where they had been; and what it has meant to them and me; and above all, to make sure they knew they had and would be loved through all of it. As I looked at their faces, I wasn't sure they really understood what was happening, that they wouldn't be back in the morning, as usual.



But then, as I reached through the open car window to give one final hug to Sean, he clutched his arms around my neck and landed a dozen kisses all over my face through his smiling but clenched teeth expression. He kept clinging and kissing — he, halfway out the window, me halfway in, forcing me to walk alongside the moving car as their mother slowly tried to make the final break away from my home. That simple, wordless, but almost desperate act of affection, told me he was unmistakably aware of what was taking place, and like us all, he was fighting the change, afraid of

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# SAYING GOODBYE . . .

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leaving and of being left.

As I watched them disappear down the street, I realized why we try to prepare for our separations with all the right words and deeds, and grieve long after our goodbyes. It is because we simply do not want to be forgotten. Though I know in their young minds my image will quickly fade, I hope all my teaching, my tending, my silliness, my worrying, and all the love I genuinely felt and gave to them, will somehow be within them, hovering somewhere in their self-esteem and confidence in this world.

Many months after, at this writing, I wonder what psychologists would say about how I handled and prepared them for our separation. I did what I always do when it comes to children. I followed my instincts and said goodbye in the best way known to me, with love. I have since called them on their birthdays, sent cards on holidays, and have heard reports that they proudly show that tiny framed photograph to new friends. I am warmed by the knowledge that our relationship blossomed to this, that I long since ceased to be just a babysitter and they long since ceased to be just a source of income.

Isn't that what loving and life is all about? When we say our goodbyes, all we really want to know is that we've made a difference in someone else's life. I take heart that surely I made a difference in theirs, and indeed, they have in mine.

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Please send articles for consideration in future issues to:

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The Child Care America campaign is a national project of The Public Television Outreach Alliance in cooperation with The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC).

Its purpose is to heighten community awareness of

quality child care. The highlight of the campaign was the documentary with Rhea Pearlman shown on April 13. Many communities are creating local task forces to address the issue. Contact your local NAEYC affiliate for more information.



# MAKING BETTER HOMES AND CENTERS BETTER STILL

Thirty of you responded to our summer survey and your feedback was both gratifying and thought-provoking. We learned that you have liked our product so far and that you have some very definite ideas about ways we can improve. We have taken all your suggestions to heart and you have already begun to see the results. The recent issues on children with special needs and language learning, both responded directly to your expressed needs. We are planning future issues around other suggestions you made: science, for example, and meeting the special social needs of young children. If one theme dominated your "wish lists" it was the desire for concrete, practical suggestions to help you with the day-to-day job of caring for children. We have recorded all your suggestions for specific articles and will use them as we plan future issues. We may even be calling on some of you for help in writing the articles.

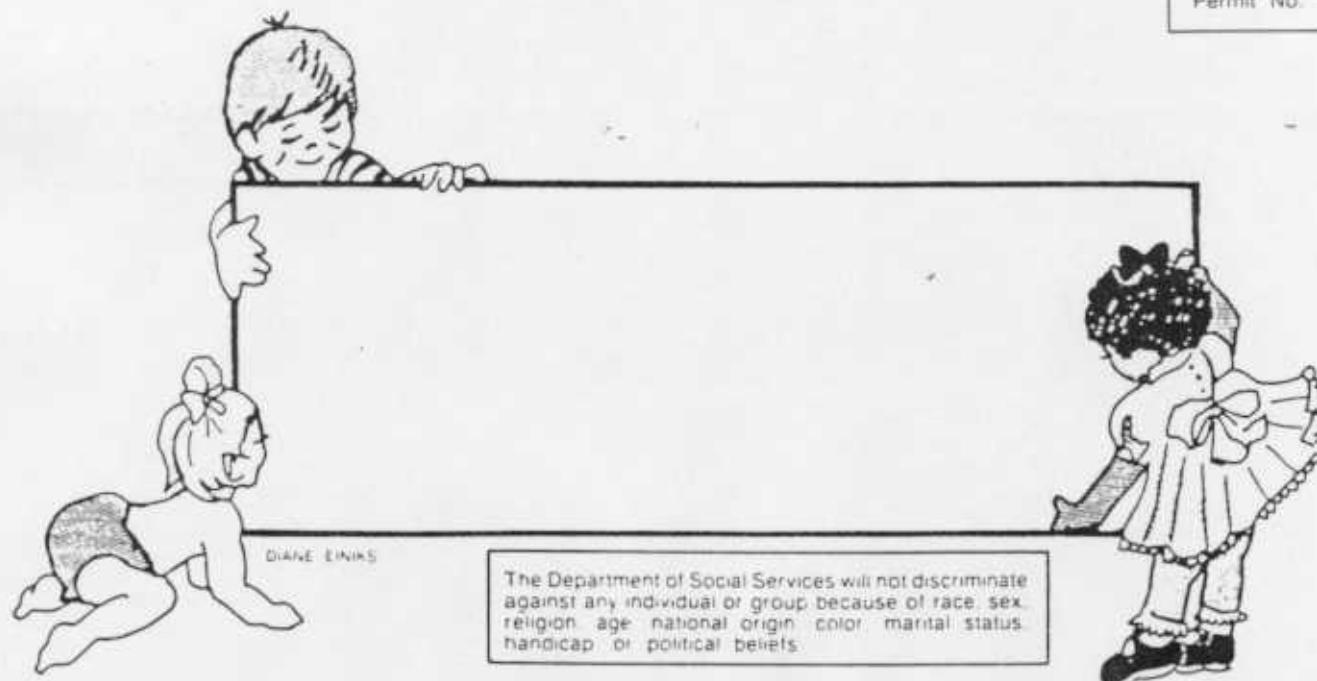
Overall, you gave us pretty good marks so far. Here's how you "graded" us:

	poor	average	good	excellent
Informative content	0	4	13	11
Readability	0	2	9	17
Interest level	1	2	15	10
Helpfulness	0	5	13	9
Useful topics	1	3	13	10
Length	1	3	12	11
Thoroughness	1	4	10	12

With regard to our regular features, "Provider's Corner" and "Director's Corner" lead your list for usefulness with 18 votes each. "Resources" and announcements of upcoming events were tied with our proposed question and answer column at 14 votes each. Some of you even sent in questions to be answered in the column when we try out the idea.

Thanks to all of you who took the time to let us know your thoughts. To those of you who meant to do so, but never got around to it, it's not too late. Find that Summer Issue and send in the survey—or just jot your remarks in a note. In the meanwhile, keep an eye out for your ideas to appear in BETTER HOMES AND CENTERS.

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